

CAN RADIO BROADCASTING BE IMPROVED?

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On behalf of the National Committee on Education by Radio, I wish to present a proposal which will capture the interest of everyone within the listening area of this station. My remarks deserve more than passing consideration because they have the unanimous approval of the nine great educational associations which constitute the Committee's membership. The organizations, national in scope, are: The National Association of State Universities, The National Catholic Educational Association, The National Association of Educational Broadcasters, The National University Extension Association, The National Education Association, The Jesuit Educational Association, The National Council of State Superintendents, The National Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, and The American Council on Education. Back of them there are millions of American citizens interested in this thing we call radio.

This Committee was called into being at the suggestion of the United States Commissioner of Education. The members of the Committee have long seen the implications and possibilities of talk at the nation's fireside which reaches young and old, literate and illiterate, reaches them all alike instantaneously and in very intimate fashion in their homes. We have seen in this an opportunity for great service to America and particularly to America as a nation that is dependent upon the accuracy of the general information received by the public, upon the attitudes of the public, upon the judgment made by the voters.

We have seen, I believe, that whatever the program, whoever directs it, there is inevitably education. The programs which come to my home, which my children listen to, exert an educational influence. I sometimes tremble as I listen to some of the programs, and yet, in order to make a proper discriminating selection of programs for those children, I have to, in the parlance of the west, "ride herd"

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on that radio continuously.

We believe there has been a growing dissatisfaction with some forms of present broadcasts. We believe there has been a growing demand for the privilege on the part of listeners to turn on their dials to things of substantial interest and worth. We feel that possibly the present programs have under-estimated the level of America's interests. I was disappointed the other day in hearing a man prominent in the radio world and speaking, I suppose, with some authority, state that in his opinion in the future radio broadcasting in America would become solely entertainment, and then he added that the entertainment would be at the street level. I think that demeans the American public. We want entertainment, but there are also times when we are interested more deeply and more keenly in things of more substantial worth.

The National Committee on Education by Radio has persistently during its four years of study sought a solution for America's problems which would cause the least disturbance to our present system. The Committee has continuously sought for some solution that would give us in America the benefits of the public systems and private systems, so, anything I say should not be construed as ill-tempered criticism of the existing system.

There are some inevitable limitations to the present system; they are obvious. It is controlled privately; it exists for the purpose of making money for its owners (It must if it persists and continues). Its revenue is chiefly dependent upon advertising; therefore, the advertiser inevitably has the final word on many things.

Being dependent upon income from advertising, it necessarily must seek the largest audiences of possible customers wherever they may be, whatever their grade of intelligence and taste may be. This results in over-broadcasting in the thickly settled areas and the scarcity of privileges in the less thickly settled

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areas of our country.

We propose a combination plan in which there shall parallel the present private commercial system a government system. Notice I said "paralleling;" in other words, supplementing but not supplanting, not displacing, the present system; not creating any undue interference with the present system; not jeopardizing the investments that have been made in the present system; but a government chain that will give programs for public interest, that will be independent of the necessities and limitations of producing income from advertising; a government system that shall select its programs solely from the standpoint of public necessity and public welfare.

This combination plan, we believe, will give America the advantages of the present private system and the advantages of the public system; where one system inevitably is limited and cramped, the other system may be strong; one will supplement the other and the combination will be the best the world possesses in broadcasting.

Under the plan we propose, all public service stations, that is, stations that are nonprofit in character, that are endeavoring to put out programs for public welfare exclusively, will be assured the privileges of hookup with the government system. That overcomes one of the great handicaps under which local individual stations have been working in the past.

We believe that that privilege, together with some others that will accrue in the system, will stimulate the establishment and promote the maintenance of local public service stations. If that be true, then the combination which we are proposing is three-fold; it is the present system with all its advantages and inevitable disadvantages; a government system paralleling that with its advantages, and perchance its disadvantages; and also a system of local stations largely independent. With that three-fold system we hold that we can depend upon

(MORE)

getting the best over the radio that America can produce.

We believe that the proposal we make is in strict accord with American principles. We believe that this American government has depended very largely upon the interplay of controversy and of ideas between minority and majority, has depended upon checks and balances, has depended upon the turmoil, if you please, of democratic discussion, study, and information. We need the opportunity for a man with ideas, even though he be in the minority, to get those ideas before the people and in an orderly way through discussion and persuasion, finally to make the ideas acceptable to the majority.

In this three-fold combination system, then, we do not have government monopoly. Therefore, many of the arguments which have appealed to you as being sound objections to a government system, do not apply because this is not a monopoly system; this is a proposal, in fact, to change the present monopoly system into one that is not a monopoly.

It is obvious that America must be assured that the sources of general information shall be correct, that there shall not be suppression of vital facts, that there shall not be vicious propagandizing, that the control shall be honest and courageous and shall be animated with a desire for public welfare. It is not wise for America to permit any system of communications by any chance to come under the too complete domination of any parties, however fine and commendable those parties may be.

The proposal that we are making is that the control shall be vested in a series of boards; first, a national board to determine national policies; advising and cooperating with the national board, a series of regional boards, these regional boards to attend to questions of regional importance and value; under the regional boards, state boards, one in each state in the Union.

Now, can America, frankly, depend with assurance upon the integrity and

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ability and the public good will of such boards? We have suggested a method whereby we think they might be selected from known leaders in public welfare, representatives of education, of religion, of labor, of medicine, of law, of public welfare of any character. We have suggested that they be selected from those leaders, nonpartisan, nonpolitical, in character; that their terms be staggered so that it would take a series of years for any party or parties to capture control of these fifty or sixty boards.

America has achieved reliability and trustworthiness in many of her public officials. I wish to mention to you as an example the public schools which spend millions of dollars annually. How many cases do you remember of public school officials being accused of malfeasance in office or improper use of power, or partisanship being dragged into the public school systems? We have succeeded in that case in electing American citizens--government officials if you please-- that have proven themselves trustworthy.

I think that America at large has great respect for her judiciary, and I ask you, is it not possible that in a thing as vital to American life as radio broadcasting we can be equally successful in selecting trustworthy officials?

I am a public school man and consequently I am familiar with the public school situation, but let me say this, that not only public but private schools are alike in this situation, and I speak for one as much as for the other. I can not foresee how America, judging by her past practice and standards can permit the entrance into the schools of radio broadcasting if it is sponsored by and paid for by advertisers. No matter how commendable the thing advertised may be, the competitors of that particular firm are going to object to the exploitation of a public institution supported by everyone's taxes for the promotion and sale of anybody's product. If that is true, then the service to the schools, public and private, is largely denied any private broadcasting system, but a public system,

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controlled by the same public that controls the schools, both public and private, can very properly be permitted to enter those schools with school programs.

In the state of Wisconsin, where state broadcasts have been made to schools, it has been proven that classes given the advantage of the vitalized stimulating effect of frequent radio broadcasts progress twenty percent faster than control groups. Education in the schools needs broadening, and here is a vitalizing influence that can come into the remotest rural school with its few pupils, out in some of our mountain canyons just as it can into your metropolitan areas. There are 30,000,000 of American citizens this year in schools, public and private. Here is an essential service which alone is sufficient to justify a governmental system with all its attendant expense and any difficulties that it may encounter.

The nation's health is of inestimable value. Our medical friends are willing and anxious to present educational health facts, but I fear that there are times that this would interfere with and perhaps make inevitable a clash with the advertisers of particular remedies, a clash which is very likely to keep from the public the facts and the truth regarding health. Health, then, is another field of service for our public chain.

All of us realize the possibilities of service the governmental system could render to public business. Our own college stations, particularly those in the land-grant colleges, have been of inestimable value in the last few years in explaining to people the various agencies which the Government was putting in operation for the relief of distress in those communities. The University of Wisconsin presents broadcasts each week by members of the state legislature who discuss the happenings at their state capital.

The University of Wisconsin last year offered free the facilities of the state station to all political parties and all political faiths, and gave them equal opportunity on the air. They claim it created and renewed a general interest in

public affairs, and that there were no difficulties connected with it.

There is no other possible justification for any broadcasting system except the rights of the listener. He pays all the bills; his interest is paramount. Nothing can be said that can, by any process, apply to the vested interests of any kind that will take precedence over the rights and values to the listener. We find that there are millions of American citizens who desire the privilege, if you please, of turning the dials on their instruments to the programs that they know are put out solely for public welfare, regarding which they know there is no suspicion whatsoever of advertising control or influence. Probably the people to whom I refer are not in the majority in America, but at least they are a large, substantial, and valuable minority.

We hear a good deal about listeners' choice. What is your choice if it is a choice between tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee? What choice have you unless you can select from a wide range of programs? Therefore, we believe that this three-fold system of the private chains, the government chain, and the local stations will, in all probability, afford the richest variety of program material.

America is trying an experiment. Other nations which have tried the experiment of popular government in the last decade have seemingly given up in despair and gone back to some autocratic form of government. America still persists in her effort and her loyalty to government of, for, and by the people, basing her faith largely upon, first of all, free thinking, the right of each man to think through and make his own decisions on questions affecting himself and the public. However, free thought is of little value without the privilege of free speech, and what is radio but free speech, an instrument which makes vocal the voice of a nation, and if that opportunity is not free than we have a restriction of the freedom of speech. We have safeguarded it in our post office where it is merely communication by letter. We have kept control of it as a Government matter even

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in the face of large annual deficits. We have extended the post office facilities to the remotest hamlet, and we have kept that line of communication open even at great expense. We have declared that telephone and telegraph shall be public utilities for the general service of the American public.

Now, here comes something that is more universal, more potent than any of these, communication by the human voice to young and old, literate and illiterate alike, and instantaneously over the entire nation. We must preserve this new instrument because of its great possibilities in American life.

We have safeguarded the freedom of speech in the press where we permit abuses rather than place the slightest danger of censorship upon the press, and through the multiplicity of newspapers here, there, and yonder, we find assurance that the truth will get out. We contend that in this plan of radio broadcasting--private, public, and local broadcasting stations--we have a diversity which offers similar security.

Here is our proposal in outline form:

"The National Committee on Education by Radio, concluding four years of study and investigation, recommends to the President, the Congress, and to the people of the United States a plan for an American system of radio broadcasting to serve the welfare of the American people.

"The people of the United States shall establish a broadcasting system to supplement but not to supplant the present private system, and to make available to American listeners programs free from advertising and presenting entertainment and information to promote public welfare. Such supplemental public system should meet as far as practicable the following specifications:

"The management of such public broadcasting system, including the determination of program policies, shall be vested in a series of boards--national, regional, and state--with suitable powers to insure service to both national and local needs. These boards should be nonpartisan, the members carefully selected from leaders active in fields of public welfare, such as agriculture, labor, music, drama, schools, religion, science, medicine, law, the arts, and other civic interests. It is suggested that appointments to the national board and to the regional boards be made by the President of the United States, confirmed by the United States Senate, and to the state boards by the respective governors, in all cases the appointments to be from lists of eligible persons nominated by the supreme courts of the several states.

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"The system shall be available for public business, for public forums, for adult education, for broadcasts to schools, for public service by nonprofit welfare agencies, and for other general welfare broadcasts.

"Nonprofit welfare stations shall be assured the right of affiliation with the federal system.

"The system shall ultimately be extended to provide satisfactory coverage of the continental United States, including remote rural sections as well as more densely populated urban areas.

"The provision of funds and the allocation of suitable broadcasting channels necessary for the effective operation of the system shall be made by the federal government.

"Recordings of programs of general significance shall be made and shall be available for broadcasting from nonprofit stations.

"A continuous program of research shall be maintained by the public boards to study the desires of the people, the preparation of programs, the technique of broadcasting, and the results of the broadcasts."

The National Committee on Education by Radio does not have unlimited resources, but we have some very good resources of a technical nature on the engineering staffs of our colleges and universities. We have investigated just far enough to believe that the proposed plan is eminently practicable, and that there are several ways in which it could be introduced and thus give an accurate demonstration of the validity of the plan. Our investigation leads us to believe that there will be practically no serious interference with the rights of present broadcasters.

Our study of European conditions and plans leads us to believe that this combination which we suggest will give America the best system in the world, a system where the defects of one particular portion are counterbalanced and offset by the advantages in another part, and we ask you in behalf of the American listeners to give this proposal most serious consideration.

We believe that radio is a resource more potent for the welfare of America than anything that has appeared since the establishment of printing. This resource is greater in its implications, in its reach, in its possible effect upon the information, the attitudes, and the judgments of the people, than even the press. We believe that the same principles which were adopted by America in assuring the freedom of the press should be adopted in this new means of communication.

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